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A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK

# HOW TO BECOME A COMMERCIAL TRAVELLER

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EDWARD B. GRIEVE



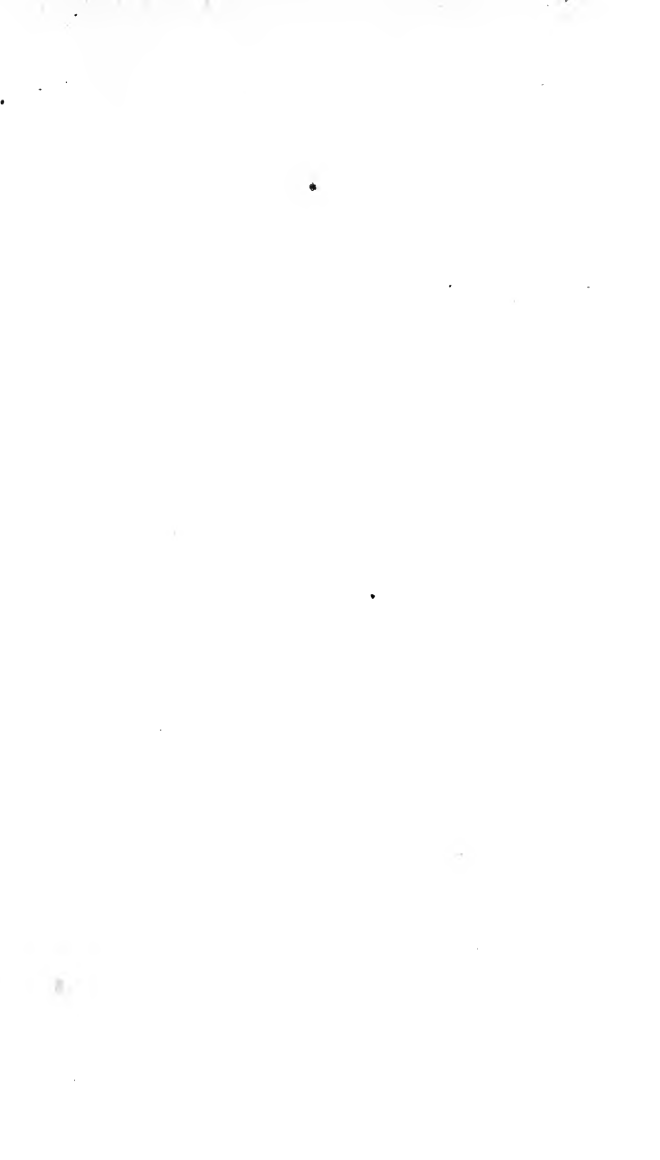
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# HOW TO BECOME A COMMERCIAL TRAVELLER

By

ED. B. GRIEVE



T. FISHER UNWIN  
PATERNOSTER SQUARE

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## P R E F A C E.

IN issuing this Handbook for the use of Commercial Travellers, I have been chiefly animated by the hope that such a work would prove useful to my fellow-travellers and especially to the beginner.

On the origin or antiquity of commercial travelling I have been silent, as I can well imagine that the present aspect of the "Road" has more interest for the reader than the past.

Customs, like fashions, change so rapidly that the procuration of business in by-gone days was conducted under circumstances so vastly different from those of the present day, that the mere recording of them herein would be of practically no assistance to the modern traveller. The enormous increase, within recent years, of manufacturers, distributors, and travellers have necessarily made great changes on the "Road"; competition has grown by leaps and bounds, bringing in its train lower prices, the necessity for more advertising, shorter and more frequent journeys, and the selling of smaller parcels than formerly.

How best then, to secure orders, to make new

## *Preface*

connections and to retain old ones, becomes more difficult with each succeeding year, and to be a successful salesman to-day necessitates abilities and tact considerably above the average, and calls for resource and perseverance, the nature of which the uninitiated has little or no conception.

Realising, therefore, the difficulties with which the commercial traveller has to contend, it occurred to me to place on record those methods of procuring business, which, after a varied experience, I have found to be the most effectual.

If a perusal of the following pages enables my readers to more readily effect sales and helps them over some of the most difficult parts of the "Road," my object in writing will be fully attained and my earnest wish gratified.

E. B. G.

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# HOW TO BECOME A COMMERCIAL TRAVELLER.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A WORD TO THE BEGINNER.

THIS chapter is intended chiefly for that section of my readers who have absolutely no experience of the "Road" and who may therefore be assumed to gladly welcome anything in the nature of advice.

Whatever conception of travelling the beginner may have formed, it is almost safe to conclude that he has under-estimated its difficulties and its disappointments.

To many, travelling appears to be a pleasant pastime—indeed, one long perpetual holiday—and it is only when they sally forth, bag in hand, eager for the fray, and get fairly drawn into the vortex of business, that they realise the magnitude of the task they have undertaken.

A traveller's life is a hard, stern, matter-of-fact routine in which one ounce of practical common-sense outweighs a ton of romance and sentiment. Rebuffs and disappointments form part of his daily

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

fare, and endless worries arise to test his patience and his temper.

Someone has said, and I think rightly, that the commercial traveller should have the diplomacy of the ambassador and the enthusiasm of the inventor, not to speak of the patience of Job, and certainly, where one is coming into daily contact with so many and varied types of human nature—each of which he is expected to please—he must, to put it mildly, know his way about.

I firmly believe that no education, however complete, can by itself make a traveller; to a certain extent he, like the poet, is born, not made.

I have no wish to discourage the young aspirant, but, at the same time, I think the best kindness that can be shown him is to portray the "Road" exactly as it is, so that, if he has any romantic ideas of its being a flowery path strewn with roses, the sooner he gets rid of such quixotic notions the better. Indeed, I am of opinion that it is nothing more than just that the beginner should have some true conception of the chequered and oft-times thorny path that lies before him.

There is an element of freedom about commercial travelling which is peculiarly fascinating and attractive to the tyro; a man is thrown on his own resources, to judge and act spontaneously, to decide promptly and correctly, and to be for ever on the watch to do and say the right thing at the right time.

Herein lies the priceless gift of tact, a gift which no curriculum, however complete—nor work, however

## *A Word to the Beginner*

comprehensive — can impart; it is the inherent quality in a man which distinguishes him from his less fortunate fellow-travellers, and, according to the share of this estimable gift with which nature has endowed him, so will his success or failure be.

Assuming therefore, my young friend, that you possess the necessary tact, a sound physique, a good address, and the element of perseverance, you have nothing to fear on the "Road," and may reasonably hope to rise in the profession, earning the respect and goodwill of your employer, your clients, and your fellow-travellers.

You may naturally feel somewhat timid and nervous on first setting out, and the prospect of entering a very large establishment and approaching a keen, alert principal may reasonably overawe you. A good way to establish self-confidence is never to lose sight of the fact that, however high the position or great the power a person wields, he is nothing more or less than a mere man, with man's ideas, characteristics, and feelings, and, if you act as a man, the chances are you will be treated as such.

I have invariably found the buyers in large houses courteous to a degree, and showing no particular desire to overawe or impress me with a sense of their importance.

In the capacity of commercial traveller, you will act, under all circumstances, as the mouthpiece of your employer, to represent his interests to the best advantage, and secure for him all the business you possibly can. To a great extent, you will assume

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

the rôle of mediator, and will form the connecting link between the buyer and the seller. The real seller, for many obvious reasons, is unable to keep in direct touch with his clients, and employs you to represent him, to make sales in his name on certain terms and conditions and, generally, to act as his agent. You will thus see that you are invested with a good deal of responsibility and as an "ambassador of commerce," your resources will be taxed to the utmost.

Speaking in a military sense, your constant endeavour will be to preserve intact the lines of communication between the manufacturer and the distributor, reconciling the one to the other, and thereby giving satisfaction at both ends.

Every recognised method and all legitimate means for attaining this result are of course permissible, and although a man's own sense of justice and fair-play should form the best guide for his actions, it is not given to every one to know exactly the best methods of procuring business creditably and in a manner beyond reproach. In his anxiety to procure business I am fully alive to the danger of the beginner unwittingly adopting methods not strictly correct, and some of the common pitfalls into which he may reasonably drop will be found treated elsewhere under their respective headings.

Much has been said of the temptations of the "Road"—its many evils and abuses—and, although much of what has been said is doubtless greatly exaggerated, it is none the less true that the commercial traveller's



## *A Word to the Beginner*

path is beset by temptations many and varied. Chief among the evils that doubtless exist may be mentioned those of intemperance and late hours. It is so easy, when one is for the time being separated from the home circle, to embark on some form of artificial enjoyment, bringing in its train late hours and dissipation. Two of the most popular forms of recreation on the "Road" to-day are Billiards and Card-playing—both, in themselves, absolutely harmless—but, alas! too often accompanied by the attendants of drinking and gambling. The temptation to have a hand at cards may be strong, but, as hour succeeds hour and glass succeeds glass with astonishing rapidity, midnight and long after will frequently find the fun still fast and furious. But what of the next morning, my friend? Pale faces, clouded brains, and shaky nerves, not to speak of empty pockets. What a miserable condition, and what a great handicap wherewith to start the day's business! The best way to avoid excesses of this kind is never to make the start, for that way spells ruin, and both physical and moral faculties must suffer. In commercial travelling, the temptations to improvidence and squandering are many, as money—though probably not your own—is so ready to hand and the outlets for spending it so numerous. You will doubtless experience considerable difficulty in avoiding and combating many of these temptations, but by presenting a bold front to them from the outset, and never forgetting the fact that, however pleasant the beginning, the end is invariably disastrous,

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

you will be enabled to perform your duties in a creditable and satisfactory manner. Against healthy and congenial forms of recreation and amusement, of course, I have nothing to urge; on the contrary, they have in me a strong advocate. What I particularly desire to impress the beginner with are the evils and abuses and the danger of succumbing to them. One of the greatest dangers the young "commercial" has to face is the treating of customers, and, after you have had a particularly good line from a man, the temptation to baptize the event is very great. Candidly, I am very much against this form of doing business, as the principle involved tends to corruption and smacks strongly of bribery.

Moreover, the practice once embarked upon has to be kept up, as the subsequent dropping of it would mean the loss of business. The treating of customers, I admit, may and sometimes does influence trade in your direction; but, on the other hand, business procured in this way is seldom lasting or sound, as the person who gives an order on the strength of a drink will be very ready to give the business to the next salesman who comes along and treats more lavishly than yourself. My contention is that business can be conducted without treating and bribing; speaking personally, after an extensive travelling experience, I can say that I never once found it necessary to treat my customers, nor have I accepted a treat from them. That also is the experience of many splendid salesmen, and one of the finest examples I have ever known was that of

## *A Word to the Beginner*

a fellow-traveller who represented a distillery company for over twenty years and never once drank with a customer. Of course, he had the usual ridicule to face at first, but he lived it down, and eventually came to be respected and trusted by all who knew him. The reader may therefore take it from me that treating of customers and bribery in business is unnecessary and unwarranted. It is very far from my intention to assume the rôle of dictator and say that a man should not drink—that should be left to himself—but I trust I may be pardoned for saying that there is a time and place for doing so, and that time is certainly not during business hours.

To my mind, nothing is more reprehensible than a traveller entering a place of business smelling of drink, and nothing will more readily lose him the respect and confidence of his clients.

And now, a few words with regard to the traveller's conduct in relation to his employer may not be considered out of place. When a "commercial" undertakes to represent a House, two things are assumed: first, that in this way he intends to earn his living, and that consequently his whole time and energies must be given to the business; and, second, that the interests of the House shall be paramount. Every employer has his own rules and methods of conducting his business, and, as a servant, you must implicitly carry them out to the best of your ability. In all you say and all you do, your House must be first, as, unless you have faith and pride in the goods you sell, you will fail to convince your hearer of their

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

good qualities. One thing very much to be condemned is the wasting of your employer's time, and the traveller who is not strictly conscientious in the discharge of his duties cannot and will not succeed. Unlike those members of the staff who are under the immediate supervision of their chief, the traveller works out of sight, and the facilities for abusing his trust are thus infinitely greater. The salesman who deliberately wastes his employer's time robs not his enemy nor the stranger, but the man who knows him and trusts him. Having now endeavoured to give the beginner a faint outline of the great profession he intends adopting, I shall not trespass further on his time and patience. The various situations—awkward and otherwise—that are certain to arise in the procuration of business will be found treated elsewhere, and to these I invite the reader's attention. My final word to the young salesman, on taking his place in the ranks of the ever increasing army of "commercials," would be, that he should be chiefly animated by the desire to preserve inviolate the best traditions of the "Road," and that a prominent place in his programme should be found for the noble qualities of industry, integrity, and sobriety.

## CHAPTER II.

### KNOWING THE GOODS YOU SELL.

It may be that some of my readers may be sent out to introduce a distinctly new line—a speciality of some kind being put on the market for the first time. In that case you have the great advantage of having no competition, but even this fact will be considerably discounted by the very newness of the article, inasmuch as it bears the stamp of speculation, its efficiency being as yet untried ; buyers, as a rule, are particularly slow to take up anything of a speculative nature.

But whether you have a new line or, what is much more likely, you carry something similar to an article already on the market, it is equally imperative that you should thoroughly know the goods you sell. With rare exceptions, it is almost safe to say that in whatever business you are engaged, there will be somebody already in the field, and, by reason of long standing or extensive advertising, you will find some Houses universally well known. Assuming that you do not represent any of those Houses, your plan will be to thoroughly study the goods you offer, and find out in what respect they compare with those of your better known rivals.

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

It is advisable, if at all possible, to show some advantage over your strongest competitors, in order to meet the perpetual argument of the buyer, "Why should I change? where is the advantage, etc., etc." In all probability you will not be able to improve on the quality of the best brands or makes, and must look in other directions for your arguments. Carefully study the article you purpose offering for its advantages; is it cheaper? is it larger? is it better packed? and in every way test it side by side with standard lines. Deduce from it the arguments in its favour, and, by making a complete study of your goods, you will be able to make up a canvass of your own. Every trade, of course, has its own stock canvass, but you should not rest content with this; you should strive, in addition, to deduce and arrange arguments of your own seeking.

It is essential that you know your lesson thoroughly before setting out, and, even if you have not grasped the subject in its entirety, make the most of what you do know, and avoid saying anything about what you are not absolutely certain. The buyer cannot perceive that you don't know, unless you betray yourself. I remember on one occasion, owing to the absence of our regular traveller, being sent from headquarters to carry through a large and intricate question. I arrived at my destination, and made myself known to the principal and his manager. Although the subject took a considerable time to get through, I said very little throughout the entire interview, for the very

## *Arranging your Arguments*

good reason that I knew practically nothing of the technicalities of the business. When referred to I could only look wise and agree with what was suggested. Eventually I secured the business, and, in all probability, left the impression with those two practical men that I was an expert. Had they known that I had only been a short time at the trade, they would probably have thought otherwise. "Knowledge is power," and a thorough acquaintance with the goods you offer is essential to success.

### A LEADING LINE NECESSARY.

Where you have a large variety of goods to offer, you will find it of advantage to make some one article a leading line, keeping it constantly to the front. If you endeavour to introduce your goods indiscriminately, you will frequently fail to place any of them. Make up your mind to sell a certain article, and, having done so, you can then readily build up your order from it. The advantages of adopting a leading line are manifold, not the least apparent of which is that, in approaching a buyer, you bring with you a definite subject for discussion. To enter a business place without knowing positively what you purpose speaking of is futile and fatal to success.

### ARRANGING YOUR ARGUMENTS.

It goes without saying that the traveller should have some definite and systematic method of putting forth his arguments. He will soon learn the stock

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

arguments of his customers, and, by constantly combating them, he should be able enough to destroy them as they arise. In this connection you have a considerable advantage over your client in so far as you are constantly rehearsing your business, and becoming saturated with it, whereas he, with such a number of details to think of, has probably not thought of your lines until he sees you. Given a fair hearing, therefore, you should manage to destroy all his stock arguments; but I have been frequently amused at the decidedly ingenious—though far-fetched excuses—put forth for not buying my goods.

I have found it the best way to arrange my arguments in the order of their strength, beginning with the mildest and gradually becoming stronger and stronger as the interest increases, and keeping in reserve one or more powerful and convincing arguments to finish up with and bowl over a hesitating buyer.

Moreover, in going through your canvass, you will find it of advantage to thoroughly exhaust one item before passing on to another, otherwise you will soon confuse both the buyer and yourself.

### BEING IN EARNEST.

I have long since come to the conclusion that no man can sell goods freely who is not thoroughly in earnest. All waverings of attention are to be avoided, and for the moment the sale, the whole



## *Being in Earnest*

sale, and nothing but the sale should claim the traveller's attention. He must concentrate his mind entirely on his business, and impart to his hearer a certain amount of his earnestness and enthusiasm.

However much we may differ from a man, we cannot but admire his earnestness and thorough belief in what he states. When you consider the matter carefully, you cannot fail to observe that the actual sale itself occupies a few moments only—the remainder of the time is so much preliminary—so, at the psychological moment, you must be in earnest. Some of the most successful salesmen I have known were men who were thoroughly in earnest and, in selling goods, concentrated their minds to such a degree that they became utterly oblivious to their surroundings.

## CHAPTER III.

### APPROACHING THE BUYER.

IN dealing with this matter, I crave the reader's indulgence for treating it at some considerable length. So much depends upon a correct approach or address that, unless the traveller is perfect in this respect, all his subsequent efforts will be rendered void. The subject is, therefore, well worthy of close attention.

Some travellers favour the practice of trying to adopt methods suitable to each customer, and certainly if it were possible to do this, nothing could be better. The characteristics of men, however, vary in such a marvellous degree—no two men being alike in every respect—that the traveller will soon discover he has undertaken an impossible task if he endeavours to carry out this principle. I would commend the practice of adopting a fixed systematic style of approach, having first assured yourself that the method adopted was as near perfection as you could possibly make it. You should then carry it through with as little variation as possible, and, by so doing, you will become more natural in your manner and consequently less

## *Approaching the Buyer*

artificial. Whatever method you adopt, you may rest assured it will not find favour with all you come in contact, as no man has yet succeeded in pleasing everybody. That particular style, however, which is appreciated by the great majority may safely be assumed to be the correct one.

Of course, I am well aware that the traveller frequently meets special men who require special treatment, and, in advocating an unvarying method of approach, it will be understood that I speak generally. You should continually bear in mind that, from the moment you come in sight of your customer, your every action and word is open to his criticism, and business men, as a rule, being good judges of character, will soon detect a flaw in your address. So much depends upon your existing relations with your client that no general rule can be laid down for your guidance which would be applicable to all cases. If you are well known to the buyer, you will have some idea of his temperament, and can act accordingly. In seeing a man for the first time, however, the case is far different and a few hints on how to act, in those circumstances, may prove useful. If you are a close observer of human nature you should be able, in a few moments, to discover a man's prominent characteristics, and thereby get the cue to your mode of procedure. On entering a business place, it goes without saying that you should not adopt a boisterous or pompous air; no buyer likes to think he is being invaded or besieged and must

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

succumb to sheer force. The traveller should never forget that he is sent out to solicit orders, and not to demand them. Neither is it advisable to approach a man in a timid or hesitating manner, as the man who lacks self-confidence is not likely to have much weight with his hearer, nor will he be able to state his case confidently and convincingly enough to make a favourable impression. What is necessary is that much desired medium between over-confidence and timidity—that nice degree of moral courage requisite for maintaining your ground and giving the impression that you have confidence in yourself and in your goods. Above all things you must be cheerful in your manner, and never approach a man with a serious or gloomy air. The chances are he will have sufficient cares of his own without you bringing a cloud on his horizon, and will be much more inclined to welcome the man who brings a ray of sunshine across his path. I know how difficult it is to preserve a smiling countenance when you have had a long succession of rebuffs and disappointments but, whatever your feelings, the pleasant manner under all circumstances must be cultivated. The danger does not solely lie in being discouraged but in the making of it apparent, as the man you approach cannot tell you are having a bad time unless he perceives it in your demeanour. You should enter a business place quietly, without ostentation, maintaining a nice degree of dignity, and, generally speaking, give the impression of

## *Unapproachable Men*

solidity. Everything in the nature of shallowness and vacuity should be strictly avoided. Although it may be considered a trivial matter, I think it is nevertheless necessary to say a word, in passing, on the simple matter of shaking hands. Some little doubt may arise as to the correct attitude on your first visit, and, as the traveller cannot afford to throw away even the slightest chance, I think the safe line to take is to refrain from offering your hand in those circumstances. You cannot be said to have any influence with a man whom you have never seen and where consequently no friendship could have existed. At your first visit, however, if you have been favourably received, and, particularly, if you have done business with your client, you may rightly shake hands on leaving. Again, when your connection is formed and you are well known to your customers, to shake hands both at the beginning and at the end of your interview is quite correct and customary. The foregoing will be found a pretty safe mode of procedure, always excepting, of course, when a man offers his hand to you, and the traveller should be quick to observe and take advantage of this.

### UNAPPROACHABLE MEN.

Considering the many phases of human character with which the traveller comes into contact, it is not surprising to hear that he occasionally meets men of a most unapproachable character. So extreme in this

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

respect are some men that all the ingenuity, tact, and ability that you can employ are of little avail, and the most specious arguments and irreproachable address may sometimes fail to make an impression. Fortunately, men of this stamp are very rare, and I venture to say that, however unapproachable a man may seem to be, there is still an opening in his armour through which you can touch his vulnerable spot. It remains with you, therefore, to ascertain this, and, if you analyse his character fully and make a complete study of his nature, it will be surprising if you fail to reach him. In other words, I think there is no man absolutely and completely unapproachable, and you may hope, by persevering in your efforts, to ultimately gain his confidence.

### ORIGINALITY IN ADDRESS

I am strongly of opinion that the salesman who strives to be original in his methods of address, will command more attention than if he went on hackneyed and threadbare lines. It is comparatively easy to suggest this idea, but it is well-nigh impossible to indicate precisely what form the originality should take. Some men, however, study this matter carefully, and I can call to mind many travellers, who, in selling goods, command great respect and attention. It may be due to their manner, their style, their voice, or their method of putting forth their arguments, but the sum total, to my mind, is largely owing to their originality.

## *Originality in Address*

They have created for themselves a distinct personality, unique in many respects, and altogether different from the average address. The brilliant man with his original methods, consummate tact, and strong personality, will accomplish infinitely more than the persistent plodder whose sole object is to make the greatest number of calls in the least possible time. It is very far from my intention to depreciate the noble quality of perseverance. On the contrary, I hold that a traveller without perseverance would be about as ineffectual as Hamlet without the ghost. I am strongly of opinion, however, that persistence by itself will not achieve the same results as perseverance and brilliancy combined.

A man may go throughout the entire day plodding systematically out of one place into another without cessation, and yet accomplish little ; persevering in the highest possible degree, but, nevertheless, ineffectual. The chances are, if he were to undergo a little self-examination, he would discover that his want of success was largely due to his constant reiteration in a parrot-like fashion of the tale he had previously learnt by rote. It is not sufficient to learn your lesson by heart and then go throughout the day repeating it in a glib manner, without variation and without due regard to the circumstances attendant on each sale. Weigh well every word you utter, giving effect and emphasis to the salient points in your argument, and, generally speaking, give your hearer the impression that, although he is hearing an old tale, it is being put before him in a more original and convincing manner

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

than usual. Endeavour therefore, without being eccentric, to be at least somewhat original, or, at any rate, something different from a mere walking automatic talking-machine, and, in so far as you differ from this, so will your originality be more apparent.

There is no necessity, of course, to waste time where you see no chance of doing business, but, where you get a fair hearing and succeed in getting your buyer interested, you should settle down to business in a scientific manner, and, by your originality and brilliant efforts, convert your sceptical hearer into a satisfied and confiding client. No man can hope to do much business who rushes into a place well-nigh holding his watch in his hand, and whose every action and word betrays impatience to be off. Originality is wanted, not rushing and forcing; brilliancy is a prominent characteristic of great salesmen.



## CHAPTER IV.

### A LITTLE JUDICIOUS FLATTERY SOMETIMES COMMEND- ABLE

EVEN at the risk of calling forth some scepticism, I must say that I consider a little flattery judiciously applied to be a good thing. True, you must know your man well before venturing on this, as flattery, to some men, would be highly obnoxious, and to others quite acceptable. One of the most successful salesmen I have known was a man who dealt out flattery in such minute doses as to be almost imperceptible, but, nevertheless, so effectual as to leave a splendid impression wherever he went. Strive, therefore, to season your remarks with a little of the sauce of flattery.

### CONTROLLING YOUR TEMPER.

One of the greatest trials the commercial traveller has to contend with is the controlling of his temper under certain circumstances. A buyer, by virtue of his position, occupies a pedestal which to you, the seller, is unapproachable, inasmuch as he can, in all probability, do without you, whereas you cannot

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

do without his support. He may therefore, if he chooses, throw mud at the man who cannot retaliate. Few men, however, thus placed, abuse their privilege, and, even if you do meet one occasionally, you may still hope to gain the victory by returning his evil by good, and, by sheer force of courtesy, make him regret his action and receive you in a manner creditable to himself. In justice to the buyer it must not be forgotten that he is often sorely tried in his multifarious duties, and I fear we travellers do not always make full allowance for this. A traveller, of all men, must be able to preserve his equanimity, and, however annoyed he may feel, should strive to appear unruffled. I fully recognise the difficulty of doing this at all times, but the salesman who gives way to his temper, or, at any rate, allows it to be shown, will decidedly prove a failure. Where you have to deal with a surly, morose man who repels your every advance with a growl, you are naturally inclined to resent it; but, realising that "the soft answer turneth away wrath," your politeness and urbanity should increase in the inverse ratio to his rudeness and incivility. When you have cases of this sort to contend with—and what traveller has not?—you will find that the conciliating spirit will frequently thaw your hearer and melt down his icy barrier.

In extreme cases, where your client has evidently made up his mind to be unfriendly and shows signs of being irritable, it would be highly injudicious to press your case just then. It is evident that the

## *Leaving a Good Impression*

moment is not opportune, and it only remains for you to take your departure with all respect and civility, preserving your unruffled demeanour to the end. You have the consolation that, under those circumstances, yours has been the greater victory; and it is well to bear in mind that, however much you may be tried, you cannot afford to quarrel with your own bread and butter. When next you see your surly client, you should be as courteous and polite as ever, avoiding all reference to your former reception, and I make bold to say that you will eventually break down the barrier, and the greater his harshness, the fuller his reparation will be.

### LEAVING A GOOD IMPRESSION.

Whether you succeed in doing business with a man or not, it is highly essential that you leave with him a good and a lasting impression, so that, at your subsequent visits, he may be disposed to give you a hearing. It is very bad form to show your disappointment at not being able to do business, and any exhibition of defeated hopes would be detrimental to your interests and destroy your chances of gaining the buyer's favour. If you cannot at first manage to get your hearer interested in your goods, endeavour, by all means, to so regulate your conduct that he will have some little interest in yourself. Having accomplished this, his interest in what you sell will follow as a matter of course.

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

### CONDUCT WITH REGARD TO ASSISTANTS AND SUBORDINATES.

It is very desirable that the traveller should court the favour of his customers' assistants as they are really the people who sell his goods. It is the easiest thing in the world for an assistant, if he feels so disposed, to keep your goods in the background, and even to furnish his chief with adverse reports on them. It is only natural that the opinion of a trustworthy assistant should carry weight with his employer, and it is the traveller's duty to see that that opinion takes the nature of a recommendation.

Many employers consult their assistants as to the advisability of buying an article, and, in those cases, much will depend upon your relations with the employees. It is not likely they will take much interest in the goods of a man who has made himself obnoxious to them, or who has ignored them entirely. A nod of recognition, a friendly word, or a kindly smile at the right moment will frequently work wonders, and, as none of these cost anything, there is no reason why they should not be made use of. There is a nice medium, however, to be observed in this respect, as engaging assistants too much in conversation would be highly injudicious. No employer likes to think that his servant's attention is being taken off his work, and would naturally resent the wasting of the time for which he alone pays. So important is this matter considered that

## *Conduct to Assistants and Subordinates*

I have seen notices exhibited in business places requesting commercial travellers not to engage the employees in conversation. Another feature of the case arising out of indiscriminate attentions to servants is, that an employer seeing you chatting confidentially with his assistant might conclude that you were bringing undue influence to bear upon him in order that he should keep your goods to the front and recommend them wherever possible. This impression once formed in the mind of the buyer would be difficult to eradicate and would be damaging to your cause; anything, therefore, that would favour such a deduction must be strictly avoided. True, your motive is inspired by the desire to court the goodwill of the assistant, and this, I hold, you cannot well do without. What I particularly desire to emphasise is that both the time and place must be opportune, and some little discretion must be exercised towards this end. Finally, it should hardly be necessary to remind the "commercial" that he should refrain from all horse-play and larking with assistants. That way leads to loss of prestige, and undue familiarity merges by easy stages from disrespect to actual contempt. Be agreeable without being effusive, and sociable without being too familiar.

## CHAPTER V.

### CONDUCT WHEN BUYER IS ENGAGED WITH ANOTHER TRAVELLER.

LIKE most professions or callings, that of commercial travelling is no different from the majority in having its rules of etiquette, and one of the most stringent of its unwritten laws is that you must not approach nor make your presence known to the buyer while he is engaged with a fellow-traveller. The reason for this is obvious, and, on the principle of "first come first served," the man in possession should be allowed full and free scope. This rule, of course, is well known to the old hand, but the beginner should be made aware of it, and realise its importance before setting out. If, on entering a business place, you find the buyer engaged with another "commercial," you should immediately withdraw with an apology, or better still, endeavour to find out if the coast is clear before going in, and, if it is not, then do not show yourself until it is. It is nothing more than just that you give your fellow-traveller—opponent or otherwise—every possible chance, in like manner as you would wish the same done by yourself. It has sometimes happened—although for the credit of the profession I am pleased to say very rarely—when I was engaged with a buyer and gradually reaching the point

## *Conduct when Buyer is Engaged*

of effecting the sale, that another traveller appeared with great clatter and demonstration, thereby distracting the buyer's attention just at that psychological moment when a straw would turn the balance either way.

It is extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible in those circumstances, to get the buyer back to that point where the connection was broken off, and the interrupting of a sale, especially when nearing completion, cannot but prove annoying to the man who is soliciting business. In addition to guarding against this, you should avoid making yourself too conspicuous or prominent while waiting your turn, and it is advisable, whenever possible, to keep out of the way entirely. The necessity for so doing, will be apparent when you consider that a buyer, on looking up, sees one or more travellers waiting to see him, and anticipating a considerable demand on his time, gets worried and dismisses the man he is talking to, promptly and empty-handed. There is an obverse side to the medal, however, and some travellers, either because of having an exceptionally hard buyer to convince or from an inconsiderate desire to unnecessarily prolong the interview, take up more than their share of the buyer's time. In those cases, the man in waiting may be pardoned for betraying a little impatience, especially if the traveller in possession shows no sign of finishing up, and the time for catching your train draws perilously nigh. You may then rightly, I think, make your presence known to your prosy friend, if you can, but to him only. Not even those extreme circumstances will justify your attracting the buyer's attention.

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

In large establishments, where certain days and hours are set apart for buying, the case is somewhat different, as the buyer expects travellers, and is there to meet them. It is customary in that case, for all the "commercial" to wait together, and the same formalities are not observed, always excepting, of course, the going in, in strict rotation, and avoiding the interruption of a sale whilst it is in progress.

### CONDUCT WHEN BUYER IS ENGAGED WITH HIS CUSTOMERS.

As previously mentioned, the "commercial" who knowingly interrupts a sale between buyer and traveller commits a grave indiscretion and lays himself open to censure. In like manner, great care must be taken not to hinder nor interfere with any sale that may be going on between the buyer and his own customer. The connection between the distributor and the buying public should be absolutely free and uninterrupted, and the traveller who impairs the communication in the slightest possible degree is not likely to find favour with a buyer.

If, on arrival at a man's store or office, you discover that he is engaged with his customers, the wisest plan is not to make your presence known until he has dismissed them. Your entrance, however unobtrusive, in those circumstances introduces a jarring element and tends to make the relationship between buyer and public less easy than before. In those establishments, however, where the buyer does not personally attend to customers, the case is different, and you may then approach him in the ordinary way.



## *The Opportune Moment for making a Sale*

Moreover, if, while you are engaged with a buyer, one of his customers appears, you should immediately retire—temporarily, of course—in favour of such client, no matter how interesting the stage or critical the point at which your sale may have reached. A man's customers naturally have the first claim on his attention, and take precedence of travellers in every case.

The very fact of showing your readiness to make way for a customer predisposes the buyer in your favour, and anything, of course, that tends in this direction must be cultivated. As the situation treated under this heading is of daily occurrence in the traveller's routine, it is highly important that he should have a correct understanding of how to act when the occasion arises.

### THE OPPORTUNE MOMENT FOR MAKING A SALE.

"There is a time and place for everything," and the truth of the proverb will be verified on studying the when and where for selling goods. The over-zealous and indiscreet traveller who worries his client for orders at a time when he is not on business bent, displays a great want of tact, and, in addition to courting present failure, will, in all likelihood, damage his future relations with the buyer. The accidental or casual meeting with a customer in a train, a tram, on holiday, or in fact, anywhere outside of his business place, does not warrant your troubling him for orders. When I have met customers in this way, I have studiously avoided the introduction of business topics, and have always endeavoured to turn the conversation into other channels. Of course, some

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

customers will talk shop, and in that case you must follow suit, but the traveller will do well to avoid taking the initiative. Not only when a man is off duty are the circumstances unfavourable for selling goods, but the moment may be equally inopportune even when he is at business, and this is a matter calling for much attention on the part of the traveller.

In approaching a man with a view to soliciting business, you should ask yourself the questions, Are the conditions favourable? Is he particularly busy? Does he appear to be worried?—in short, is your visit well timed, and are the surroundings conducive to success? Perhaps at your visit you may find the buyer deep in his correspondence, or superintending some part of the establishment, or busy with his customers. That being so, you may safely assume that he is not in the mood for receiving travellers—particularly, long-winded ones—and if you could possibly postpone your visit, for the time being, it would be judicious to do so. You could meanwhile make some calls in the neighbourhood, and catch up your busy client at a more convenient hour.

I am fully aware, however, that it is not always possible to double back on your customers, as a certain amount of time is lost in the process, and this the traveller cannot well afford. It will sometimes happen, therefore, that you have no alternative but to approach your man, notwithstanding the fact of his being busy, and, in that case, a few words of advice may be profitably borne in mind. All circumlocution and beating about the bush must be eschewed, and nothing but the bald statement of

## *The Opportune Moment for making a Sale*

your business in the fewest possible words is desirable. The less time you occupy in those circumstances the better your customer will like it, and the introduction of anything foreign to the business would be suicidal policy. Occasionally you may find a man so busy that he cannot spare you a moment at all; in fact, I have been stopped in the act of crossing the threshold by the buyer calling out that it was no good coming in to-day. This is no doubt hard on the man who is sent out to procure orders, but you have no choice in a matter of this kind, and can only look pleasant and pass on. It is useless, in those extreme circumstances, to make further advances. The moment is decidedly inopportune, and anything in the nature of persistence would probably result in friction, and might easily culminate in the sad spectacle of an angry buyer on the one hand and a crestfallen traveller on the other. Enough has been said, I think, to show the necessity for carefully watching the time and place of approach, and now it may reasonably be asked, "When is the opportune moment, and under what conditions may I hope to meet with the greatest success?"

The reader who expects to hear, in reply, of some extraordinary circumstances, will, I fear, be disappointed, as the best time for selling goods is simply when the buyer is absolutely free—at that lucky moment when he has nothing else on hand—that is truly the opportune moment and the traveller's golden opportunity. It is then that you may strengthen your connection, and introduce your new lines with safety.

## CHAPTER VI.

### BORING THE BUYER.

HOWEVER much courtesy and the usages of society demand the toleration of a bore, it does not follow that he will meet with the same consideration on the "Road." Persevering in the face of opposition and earnestly persuading a man to buy is pardonable—indeed commendable—but unduly pressing and worrying a client to the verge of boredom is a grievous and, I fear, a too common mistake. I admit that it is necessary to push goods in order to sell them, but the traveller should early learn to know when to discontinue his solicitation, and should be careful not to cross the line of demarcation which separates legitimate persuasion from importunity.

In breaking new ground, where neither your House nor yourself are known to the buyer, a little extra pressure may be required, but, under no circumstances, must you become troublesome. If you do, you will soon find yourself shunned and avoided, and, so far from being pleased to see you, the buyer's whole object will be how he can best escape you.

Of course some buyers are particularly tetchy and easy to ruffle, and, at the slightest indication of pressure on the part of the traveller, may become

## *Ascertaining who is the Buyer*

irritable. In those cases your persuasion should be of the mildest and blandest description, and anything in the nature of rushing or forcing sales would be decidedly dangerous. Occasionally, the salesman may find a buyer willing enough to argue, but, having made up his mind not to buy, and, finding himself, as it were, gradually being driven into a corner, he may get rather nasty and thereby bring the interview to an abrupt end. It cannot be said that the traveller is to blame here, as the buyer drew him on, and, finding his defence broken down, took the last resource of a foolish man. The circumstance is nevertheless unfortunate, and the "commercial," by carefully watching the first signs of the coming storm, may frequently prevent a *contretemps* of the nature described.

Since boring consists largely in the constant reiteration of a subject in which the hearer has no interest, you should be careful to present your case in an attractive and agreeable manner.

Indeed the whole subject is worthy of much attention, and the salesman should strive earnestly to avoid gaining the unenviable reputation of being considered a bore.

### ASCERTAINING WHO IS THE BUYER.

In the early days of my travelling career, I was for a long time puzzled with the question, "How shall I know the buyer, and what are the best means of establishing his identity?" Not only when he begins

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

travelling, but also in breaking new ground, the question presents itself to the salesman, and a correct understanding is essential. As it was utterly impossible, in either case, to know beforehand who was in authority, I pondered the matter carefully and found that two courses were open, both of which were quite legitimate and permissible. One way was, on entering a business place, to ask to see the buyer, and this method is the one adopted by the great majority of travellers to-day. I cannot, in justice, urge the slightest objection to this mode of procedure, but, nevertheless, I may say, without egotism, that the alternative method, which I have invariably adopted, is even more suitable. And that is nothing more or less than to assume, in every case, that the person addressed has power to order. I argued in this way, if he is not the buyer he may feel somewhat gratified at being mistaken for that estimable person, thus securing his goodwill at the outset. On the other hand, if the man you address is the buyer, you have secured the information without asking for it, and have enlisted his appreciation of the entire stranger who has evidently been able to identify him at sight.

If the person addressed allows you to run on putting forth your case in the ordinary way, it is pretty safe to assume that you are talking to the right man, otherwise he will soon put you right by saying he is not the buyer.

The chief objection to asking for the buyer, appears to me to exist in the fact that the person you ask

## *Obtaining Interview with Buyer*

may be the buyer himself. It would be rather awkward if you were to approach an individual, who, from his youthful appearance, you never dreamt had authority, and on asking him pointedly to see the buyer, he were to reply, "I am the buyer, sir," in a tone of voice indicating resentment at your ignorance of the fact. Appearances are worthless as a guide, as you will frequently discover that the buyer, or even the principal, in large establishments, are comparatively young men whom the stranger might easily take for a subordinate. The mistaking of a master for his servant, however unintentional on your part, cannot but have a prejudicial effect. Although the method of asking to see the buyer is the one usually adopted, I cannot rid myself of the belief that it has objections, and is calculated to cause errors of judgment. I have, therefore, a decided leaning to the alternative method of assumption already indicated, as, in this way, you can obtain the same result with the advantage of having conciliated all concerned.

### OBTAINING INTERVIEW WHEN BUYER IS IN HIS PRIVATE OFFICE.

It frequently happens, especially in introducing a new article, that the salesman experiences considerable difficulty in getting to see a buyer in his private office. In most large establishments, and indeed in many small ones, the buyer has his own office, in which he sits securely barricaded against the im-

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

petuous charges of pushing travellers. As you cannot well say that you have come to see him on a private matter, you send in your business card, and it is almost safe to say that, in nine cases out of ten, you will get the stereotyped reply, "Nothing to-day, thank you." The result is an aggravating one for the "commercial," and, unless he can devise some means of overcoming the difficulty, his visit will be rendered void, and resolve itself into a farce.

You are denied the great advantage of seeing the man whom you desire to do business with, and, as it is practically impossible to sell goods to a person you cannot see, you must endeavour, by all reasonable means, to get an interview. As I knew from past experience, the answer that was almost certain to be sent out, I had my sample-bag opened while the assistant was taking in my card, and had some little interesting line ready, with particulars, which I sent in with apologies, to the buyer, for his consideration. By so doing, I have found in many cases, that the buyer, perhaps feeling himself morally bound to come out and hand you your sample, gave you the opportunity you so much desired. You may thus often draw your man from his place of security, and have the satisfaction of knowing that your visit has not been absolutely fruitless. I am well aware that even this plan may not have the desired effect on every occasion, but I maintain that it will enable you to see the buyer more frequently than you otherwise would. Where a traveller is intimate with his customer, the case is different, and when a buyer



## *Obtaining Interview with Buyer*

sends out word that he cannot see him, the presumption is that he is pressed for time. In that case, it might be as well to pass on without troubling your client further—particularly if you are calling at short intervals. That is a matter for your own discretion, and knowing the buyer as you do, no advice from me is necessary.

To that section of my readers, however, who may be engaged in breaking new ground—where they have never yet seen the buyer—the mode of procedure suggested may frequently prove effectual.

## CHAPTER VII.

### KNOWING WHETHER A MAN WILL BUY.

IF a commercial traveller could always tell positively and correctly whether or not a man would buy, I should unhesitatingly pronounce it one of the greatest gifts he could possess. Such a gift would be priceless, as it would enable him to economise his time to the full, and to reserve his energies for actual use. But although some men have brought the knowledge to a high state of perfection, absolute certainty in the matter is, alas, impossible. Indeed, old travellers of thirty or forty years' experience on the road, have confessed to me that they have never been able to acquire this knowledge completely, and have frequently been puzzled in knowing exactly whether to take "no" for an answer. In the first stages of his approach, the salesman is continually met with a refusal on the part of the buyer, and it thus becomes a matter of great difficulty to analyse the position of affairs. Nor is it surprising that a buyer does not readily rise to the bait; put yourself in his place; he probably holds large stocks of similar goods to yours, some of them slow sellers and others bad stock. Why should he buy more—seems unreasonable to expect it. When you add to this

## *Knowing whether a Man will Buy*

the fact of his never having heard of your House nor having ever seen you before, it will be more readily understood why a buyer invariably says "no" at first. It may astonish some of my readers to learn that after travelling in nearly every part of the British Isles, I very rarely met a man who said he wanted my goods. He always said "no," and the traveller who usually takes the buyer at his word will soon find, like Othello, "that his occupation is gone."

Another agency that causes a buyer to ward off your solicitations is this. Whatever preliminaries you employ in approaching him, the sum total to his mind is the same, viz., you want him to spend money, and you may rest assured he will fight against doing so as long as possible. It is not sufficient for him to know that he shall get in return certain fair equivalents; all he sees or cares to see is the spending of the money, with sometimes a problematical prospect of getting it returned. He therefore looks with suspicion on an article, until you have convinced him that the investment is a safe one.

Enough has been said, I think, to account for the negative attitude of the buyer, and it would be well to bear in mind that a point-blank refusal should not always be taken literally. I have frequently found, after being repeatedly met with the buyer's "no," that I have eventually booked his order. Not only so, but I have also discovered that he was in urgent need of the very goods which he had so positively assured me he would not buy. This shows the fallacy of

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

always taking "no" for an answer. There was an order actually waiting for the right man to come and book it, and, if I had taken the buyer at his word in the first instance, the next competitor who followed me would have secured the business, providing he had sufficient staying powers.

Since the salesman may, therefore, expect to meet with a succession of refusals, the question naturally arises, by what token shall he know whether the possibility of doing business does actually exist? Frankly, then, there is no infallible method of discerning this, and his whole course must be shaped towards penetrating the buyer's intentions. Truly a difficult task, but, with the aid of tact and observation, a by no means impossible one. The traveller should be quick to note the first signs of hesitancy on the buyer's part, as the faintest indication of wavering shows that his mind is not definitely and irrevocably made up. Watch every shadow that crosses his face as you press home your strong points, and, if you are a close observer, you cannot fail to perceive whether you are making an impression. If you can get your hearer sufficiently interested to ask some details of your business, much has been already gained. Endeavour, therefore, to excite his curiosity, e.g., suppose you carry a distinctly new line, a little by-play on the following lines will frequently work wonders: "I have in my bag, sir, an article which you could never possibly have seen before; a distinct novelty, now being shown for the first time. I should like to have your opinion on it," etc., etc.

## *Knowing whether a Man will Buy*

I have always considered when a man even asked my price for certain goods, that the case was not hopeless. Having once raised the faintest prospect of doing business, you must never leave off, but should put forth all your energies and leave no stone unturned to make the prospect a certainty. Forget everything but the present, as you may go throughout the remainder of the day without getting a similar chance. Nor does it follow that, although a man does not appear interested, he will not buy. I have sometimes met buyers who presented a most inflexible attitude, who listened to my arguments, who made no comment nor gave any outward sign of being impressed. And, to my surprise, they suddenly broke in without warning and ordered the goods. I could not tell what occasioned it, as to all outward appearance I had practically no chance. Perhaps some point in the argument struck him forcibly and converted him. Bearing these things in mind, therefore, I have come to the conclusion that until a man says positively and decisively that he won't buy, in a manner you cannot mistake, the possibility of doing business may exist. The traveller is accordingly justified in persevering with his canvass until he gets a final and decisive answer. You cannot mistake the emphasis, the gesture, the resolute tone which distinguishes the ultimate decision from the vacillating attitude of the undecided buyer. The real secret lies in the ability of the traveller to discriminate between a succession of "noes" that may be converted into "yes," and the real, final, and

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

positive refusal. The line of distinction is oft-times nearly imperceptible, or so apparently non-existent as to deceive the old and experienced hand. Although you may not therefore hope to become infallible in your discernment, you may reduce your errors of judgment to a minimum, and, by studying the matter carefully, you will frequently be able to know correctly whether or not a man will buy.

### BREVITY IN SELLING GOODS.

“Brevity is the soul of wit”—and business—the author might appropriately have added. In order to economise your own time, as well as that of the buyer, it is advisable to get to business promptly and to take your departure at the earliest possible moment. To the busy man every moment has its actual value, and lengthy dissertations on matter foreign to the subject would be decidedly unwelcome.

Particularly at your first visit you must strive to be brief and to the point; too much circumlocution would tire your hearer, and enlarging too much on general topics might readily be considered presumptuous and altogether too friendly on the part of an entire stranger. Few things will aggravate an active, energetic buyer so much as a prosy individual who takes so long to state his case that his hearer has lost all patience before he gets through with it. Let your every action and word show alertness and activity, and, by showing the buyer your evident desire to take up only the smallest fraction of his time, you

## *Brevity in Selling Goods*

will give him the impression that you are a business man. All through my travelling experience I have endeavoured to be as brief as possible in selling goods, and, paradoxical as it may seem, my greatest successes have been gained in the least possible time. Of course, many buyers would soon draw you up if you were becoming too prosy, but the very fact of their requiring to do this would be unfortunate, and the best way is to leave no opening for their censure. When your connection is formed and you are well known to your clients, the matter is very different, and, in those cases, you may often find it necessary to spend some little time on subjects interesting to your customer, though probably outside the immediate pale of business. Indeed, with some long-winded clients, the difficulty is to get away from them, but, generally speaking, after the traveller has finished his business, he should be quick to seize the first opportunity for taking his departure. The entrance of a customer for your client is probably one of the best chances you can have for saying good-bye.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### GETTING SAMPLE-BAG OPENED.

THE getting of a sample-bag opened may seem, at first sight, so easy of accomplishment that the very mention of it may appear superfluous. A little reflection, however, will show that the opportunity of showing your samples is not to be had merely for the asking. On the contrary I have met travellers in certain trades who have gone for more than one day vainly striving to get permission to show their goods. I have always considered that half the battle was won when I succeeded in opening the bag and got an opportunity of showing my samples.

The buyer knows well that the showing of goods frequently leads to business, and, if he is not in a buying humour, he will strive to avoid looking at your samples. All your tact and ability should therefore be employed in gradually but imperceptibly leading up to the point of showing your goods. You should never be too prominent or abrupt in getting your bag opened, but rather let the road leading thereto be easy and gradual. In combating determined opposition where the buyer expressly forbids you to open out, a good way is to give him the impression



## *Selling from Samples*

that you merely wish him to see your lines in order to have his opinion thereon. Realising then that he is not committed to buy, and feeling gratified that his opinion is considered worth having, a buyer will frequently allow you to exhibit stock. This, of course, is what you desire, and he will be a slow man indeed who does not make the most of this opportunity. Never carry your receipt-book in your pocket, but always in your sample-bag, so that when it is necessary to settle an account, you must perforce open the bag, to get the book. Not only so, but the salesman will do well to carry his note-book and his statements in company with his samples, so that practically nothing can be done without having access to them. Your sample-bag is thus opened in a natural and indispensable manner, and it goes without saying that you will be careful not to close it until you have shown the buyer its contents.

### SELLING FROM SAMPLES.

The necessity for carrying samples of one's wares is every year becoming more evident, and, wherever the business warrants it, it is advisable and even highly essential, that as much stock as possible should be carried and shown. One of the causes that necessitates the carrying of more stock than formerly, may be found in the fact that buyers, in the past, were often grievously disappointed with goods, which, from the description or illustration, promised to be

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

something much superior to the real article. Again, competition is doubtless responsible for much of the altered conditions, coupled with a natural and laudable desire on the part of the manufacturer to place a greater variety before his client. Be the causes what they may, it cannot be denied that men have now reached a point that they will rarely buy anything they cannot see, handle, taste or smell. When a buyer has an opportunity of testing what he is buying, it will do much more towards convincing him than the most perfect illustrations or flowery descriptions. Not only will the carrying of samples result in more business, but the oftener a traveller handles his wares the more familiar does he become with their nature and characteristics, and, as a consequence, he will become better able to speak of them. Moreover, the time occupied by the buyer in looking at samples is of great value to the salesman, in so far as it enables him to gain, as it were, a little breathing time in which to gather his forces and prepare for attack. With the exception of those trades, where samples are unnecessary or impracticable, most businesses permit of selling from samples, and my contention is that the extra inconvenience that may be caused by carrying them will be more than counterbalanced by the increase in sales.

## *Emphasising the Strong Points*

### EMPHASISING THE STRONG POINTS OF YOUR ARGUMENTS.

A good gift of the "gab" is generally considered to be a most essential attribute in a traveller, and, although there is doubtless a certain amount of truth in the remark, I adhere firmly to the belief that quality in speech and not quantity will command the greatest success. The ability to talk well is much more desirable than to talk much, and nothing could be more injurious to a salesman's reputation than to earn the title of "gasbag." Where you have a decided advantage over your rivals, either in price or in any other form, it certainly behoves you to make the most of it. You cannot too strongly impress the fact upon the buyer, as you thereby hold out an inducement for him to change his present source of supply and give you a share of his trade. Nothing, however, will warrant your monopolising the entire conversation, and it is tactless—if not actually selfish—to run on as if the man who is expected to buy and pay for your goods had no claim to have a say in the matter. In long struggles with the buyer, where he is very undecided and slow to make up his mind, it will often be found necessary to rehearse your strong points time after time. In those cases, the science of making sales will be best shown by avoiding too much repetition of the same arguments in the same words, as therein lies the danger of tiring your hearer. You may guard against this by returning to the subject from various standpoints,

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

always presenting the same ideas, but under different aspects, *e.g.*, assuming you have advantages, say, in price, size, and appearance, and have exhausted your arguments in favour of the price, turn then to the size, making as much of that as you safely can, and then take up the appearance. Presuming your man is still undecided, return to the price again, varying your approach this time if possible, and so on, always presenting variety, but keeping to the front the chief points in your favour.

When the sale has reached a climax and the matter is so delicately poised that a hair may, so to speak, turn it either way, you must at that exact moment lay great stress on the advantages you have to offer, and so turn the scale to your side.

### EXTRAVAGANT PRAISE OF GOODS.

In making sales there is sometimes a strong temptation to claim qualities and virtues for our wares which they do not quite possess, at any rate, not in the degree indicated. While it is absolutely necessary for the traveller to praise his goods highly in order to sell them, it is none the less objectionable to use extravagant terms in their commendation, and to say that your goods are "the best in the world" etc. etc., is foolish, indeed ludicrous. A man could not conscientiously make an assertion of that kind unless he had previously tested every existing make or brand and found them inferior to his own. The shrewd business man of to-day, therefore, is not likely

## *Extravagant Praise of Goods*

to be caught with such chaff. Certainly, if you feel it to be true, you might rightly say that your wares are unsurpassed by any on the market, and therefore equal to the very best, but that is a much different thing from claiming advantages not possessed by any other maker on earth. If the goods offered are unique and stand alone, considerable license may be extended to the salesman in extolling their qualities, but, generally speaking, the questionable practices of gross exaggeration and extravagant praise may profitably be left untried.

In order to show the absurdity of unreasonable commendation, let us suppose a by no means uncommon case. A traveller who has invariably made a practice of saying his goods were first and his opponent's nowhere, by-and-by changes to a rival firm, and proceeds to call on his old customers. How unreasonable it would be to solicit orders for goods which, on his own showing, must be inferior to those he formerly carried, and how ridiculous it would be to expect a man to stop buying from a House which the traveller so often assured him was the best in the world. I much fear such a traveller would have frequently to go through the undignified process of eating his own words. Reasonable and legitimate praise of one's wares is commendable and will command infinitely more respect and attention than wild and foolish statements unsupported by evidence, and existing only in the imagination of a tactless salesman.

## CHAPTER IX.

### ALLUDING TO GOODS OTHER THAN YOUR OWN.

THE act of meddling with matters not exactly in one's own province is intolerable under any circumstance, and the traveller who makes unnecessary allusions—complimentary or otherwise—to any goods other than his own, is not likely to find favour with a buyer. In this connection, two facts should never be lost sight of ; you are sent out by your employer to recommend his goods only, and, independent of your aid, the respective salesmen will say all that is necessary on behalf of their own wares. Perhaps you are much interested in some friend on the "Road," and, in an excess of zeal, you may be tempted to say a word to your customer in favour of your friend's goods. Evidently a commendable action, but, even at the risk of decrying your good intentions, I firmly maintain that your recommendation is unjustifiable, and could not be construed into anything else than undue interference. If the recommending of a fellow-traveller's wares be considered wrong, it must needs follow that to speak in a disparaging strain is much worse. So important, indeed, do I consider the latter action that I have dealt with it separately, and it will be found treated under its particular heading. If your opinion is

## *Emphasising the Net Cost*

asked on certain goods, the case assumes a different aspect, and you may use your own discretion thereon ; but nothing, I think, will warrant your volunteering an opinion, even if it should be complimentary.

### EMPHASISING THE NET COST.

The difference between quoting list prices, less the discount, and quoting the actual net cost does not seem at first apparent, nor, in truth, does any difference actually exist. To my mind, however, a distinct difference in impression is conveyed to the hearer, and where discounts, particularly large ones, are given, the salesman should make a strong point of the net cost. Every buyer likes to understand exactly how much he is expected to pay for his goods, and the price should be quoted free of all charges and deductions. By so doing no misunderstanding is possible, and the cost, though still the same, appears less. It is infinitely better to emphasise the fact that an article cost eighteen shillings than to quote twenty shillings, less ten per cent. discount. You quote from the list twenty shillings, less the discount, but the goods do not cost twenty shillings but only eighteen, and this fact should be driven home. I have always made a point of working all my wares out to their actual net cost, and have thus been able to state instantly what the buyer had to pay. Not only so, but, in selling goods by weight or number, the traveller will find it advantageous to reduce them to units, showing the net cost per lb. or for each article, and by placing this figure against the

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

buyer's selling price, it will at once be seen, in a simple and unmistakable way, exactly how much profit can be made on each article.

My whole contention is, that the <sup>more</sup> ~~less~~ trouble you save the buyer the better he will like it, and, by paying some little attention to buying and selling prices, you will be better able to show the buyer his profits. In buying goods, two chief points are ever present to the buyer's mind, viz., how much am I to pay, and for how much can I sell; and the traveller who leaves no stone unturned to make the margin separating the two figures appear as great as possible will certainly meet with the greatest success.

### DISPARAGING AN OPPONENT'S GOODS.

To undervalue or depreciate an opponent's goods in order to place your own is a most reprehensible action, and one which no traveller worthy of the name will descend to. In addition to being ungentlemanly and unfair, such an action is foolish in the extreme, as the motive is so apparent that the buyer will at once see it; few men will appreciate you running down an opponent, and your action will thus defeat its own ends. "People who live in glass houses should not throw stones at their neighbours," and the salesman who makes a practice of slinging mud at his rivals must expect to get hard things said of himself in return. Even if your opinion is asked about goods other than your own, great care should be exercised in criticising them.



## *Emphasising Smallness of Trial Orders*

I have been frequently shown an opponent's wares and requested to criticise them, but have never once, to my knowledge, pronounced an adverse opinion thereon. As a consequence, I do not believe I ever lost a pennyworth of business for my employer, but, on the other hand, have secured orders thereby which I did not expect. If you cannot conscientiously say anything good of your rivals, in such a case "silence is golden," as it would be inconsistent with commercial honour to say your goods were superior to even the humblest of your opponents.

With ordinary care and experience, I hold that one manufacturer may make goods equal to any other. If the best and purest materials are used to the best advantage in making the goods you offer, who, I ask, can do any better? at any rate, so far as quality is concerned. Of trade secrets, recipes, and kindred matters I am of course fully sensible, but, with these exceptions few manufacturers can truthfully say they alone possess the secret or ability to make certain goods. It is therefore absurd and ridiculous for a traveller to go on the lines that he sells wares superior to all others, and no man is justified in running down the productions of another House, whose sole crime consists in being an opponent.

### EMPHASISING THE SMALLNESS OF TRIAL ORDERS.

In opening new accounts or in introducing a decidedly new line, where the transaction is necessarily of a speculative nature, the salesman will



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do well to lay considerable weight and emphasis on the smallness of the parcel. As few buyers will give a large opening order for goods, Houses are compelled to make the trial parcel as small as possible. The traveller should not be slow, therefore, to impress the buyer with the trivial nature of the speculation, enlarging upon the fact that, when viewed from the gloomiest standpoint, the loss could only be infinitesimal, and so on. Naturally he does not wish to lose anything, and some men are so exceedingly non-speculative that they will not buy an article unless there is an absolute certainty of selling it at a profit. As you cannot definitely guarantee the sale, unless you are prepared to take the goods back if they don't sell, the next best thing you can do is to bring prominently before the buyer's notice the small risk he incurs, and thereby add still another to the many levers necessary to move an extremely cautious buyer.

### ADVICE V. SUGGESTION IN SELLING GOODS.

Few people, perhaps, find it necessary to observe the nice distinction that exists between advising and suggesting, but to the commercial traveller a strict discrimination is all-important. In fact I make bold to say that, because of the close approximation of the one action to the other, it forms one of the most common and dangerous rocks on which he may come to grief. Good accounts have been closed and the chance of opening new ones irretrievably damaged

## *Advice v. Suggestion in Selling*

by the inability of the salesman to judge correctly as to where suggestion stops and advice begins. There is a considerable difference between advising a man to buy and in suggesting the same thing.

In the first case, the traveller takes upon himself to give counsel to the buyer, thereby arrogating to himself a superior knowledge—always an unpalatable action—whereas, in suggesting, he modestly and delicately indicates and submits for approval a certain line of procedure. I admit there is a great temptation in selling goods to fall into the error of too strongly advising your client to buy, and conveying the impression that he is foolish in not doing so. This is treading on dangerous ground, and the traveller will sometimes find, when it is too late, that the damage is done. The buyer flares up and says, "What do you mean, sir, by coming here to teach me my business? Don't I know best what to buy and what not to buy," etc. etc. Exactly so! there you have the kernel of the whole matter; you must strictly guard against saying and doing the slightest thing that could be construed into teaching a man his business. Everyone naturally thinks that they know best how to conduct their own affairs, and, as some men are super-sensitive on this point, the act of advising may profitably be discarded in favour of the milder and more acceptable mode of suggestion. The line of demarcation may be slight, but it nevertheless exists, and the traveller who strictly observes it, will run little risk of ruffling his sensitive client.

## CHAPTER X.

### SHOWING ORDER-BOOK TO EFFECT SALES

IN order to strengthen their case, some travellers believe in showing the buyer the entries in their order-book as a proof of the business done in that particular neighbourhood or town. There is a good deal to be said in favour of this method, as a man is generally disposed to buy goods which he knows are being freely bought by others.

He concludes that what the majority is doing is likely to be the right thing, and, at any rate, if the investment turns out a failure, he will have the consolation that he is not the only one who has been bit. Sometimes the salesman has to deal with a buyer who prefers to have the sole handling of an article for his district, as, in this way, he is better able to prevent the cutting of prices.

The tendency of business Houses, however, is to increase rather than restrict the number of their distributors. That being so, the traveller may often influence a buyer by quoting his local sales, but, in so doing, he should be careful to avoid precisely indicating who has bought. I have always borne in mind the fact that those who bought from me would probably not like to know that I was parading their business to a rival in trade.

## *Assisting Buyer to make up his Mind*

Even when asked point-blank if Mr — had ordered a parcel I have courteously declined to say, at the same time informing my inquisitive friend that, in the same way I would not tell anyone what he had bought. He invariably saw it in that light and appreciated the principle.

It is quite permissible to tell a man, if necessary, how much business you have done in his district or town, but I think you should draw the line at indicating with whom the goods have been placed. It is possible to show the entries of your sales without showing names, and this plan will be found sufficient to serve the purpose intended, without incurring the danger of offending your other customers. In addition to forcing sales, the showing of recent entries will be found useful, in proving quantities and prices, particularly if a buyer appears to doubt whether you are quoting him the best terms. I have heard of salesmen who carried two order-books, one of which contained a grand array of fictitious orders wherewith to impress a likely buyer. On such a dishonourable action I offer no comment, as their non-success and loss of prestige will doubtless be sufficient punishment.

### ASSISTING THE BUYER TO MAKE UP HIS MIND.

The spirit of indecision on a buyer's part is one of the most common—though none the less formidable—obstacles to making sales that present themselves to the commercial traveller. It is absolutely

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necessary, therefore, that some little attention should be paid to the best and most effectual means of assisting a buyer to make up his mind. Judicious promptings and tactful suggestions will no doubt do much towards bringing a man to the point of ordering, but it is possible to convince him on most points that he would be safe in buying your goods, and yet the sale may not be effected because of his inability to make up his mind definitely as to quantities and proportions. This will occur frequently when you are placing a new line before him, as in that case he has no precedent to guide him. Unless the buyer is perfectly clear on all points, there is a strong tendency on his part to leave the matter in abeyance until he has weighed everything up. But "there is danger in delay," and the traveller will frequently find that the postponement of a likely sale is merely the preliminary to its ultimate rejection.

At your visit it is advisable to endeavour by every means possible to make the buyer's decision absolute, and for this purpose you will find it advantageous to have a suggestive order ready for his consideration.

Whenever I was given a new line to introduce, I made up mentally a reasonable trial order in suitable proportions, and by submitting it to the buyer, I am convinced that I was able to place it on many occasions that otherwise would have resulted in failure. In fact, my old order-books show that ninety per cent. of my trial orders were identical in all respects, thus proving that the great majority of buyers had to be assisted in making their selection. From

## *Giving the Buyer too long to Consider*

practical experience, therefore, I am positive that the salesman who carefully studies the question of suggesting a reasonable parcel to a wavering buyer will be agreeably surprised at the number of times he will succeed in placing it.

### GIVING THE BUYER TOO LONG TO CONSIDER.

To ponder or weigh a matter carefully before deciding is no doubt commendable, particularly if the issue involves the spending of money, but I much fear that the salesman who gives the buyer too long to consider will have often to go without an order. At the outset of my travelling career I was frequently surprised and considerably disappointed to find that, after receiving every attention from a buyer and when he appeared to be favourably impressed with my goods, I was not successful in making the sale. After stating my case as fully and convincingly as possible, I have said, "Now then, sir, I have told you all I know concerning this article, and it remains with you to say yes or no"; and then followed an awkward pause of a few seconds of deep consideration on the one side and eager expectancy on the other—said pause being broken, in too many cases for my liking, by the buyer's decided "Not to-day, thank you!" The sale was then often lost beyond recall, and all my energy and earnestness rendered void. This disappointing result was of such frequent occurrence that I began to look for the likely cause, and on subjecting myself to a little self-examination, I arrived at the conclusion

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that the failure in many cases was due to giving the buyer so long to weigh up the *pros* and *cons* that the arguments against buying had developed in his mind to such formidable dimensions that he decided against the sale.

Thereupon I altered my tactics, and ever since, in cases similar to the above, I have not given the buyer those few seconds of a pause, but have canvassed him right down, without a moment's cessation till I got a positive and final decision. The inducement to refrain from buying is generally so strong that a man has not only to be brought round to a buying humour, but he has also to be kept there. You must never, therefore, leave your man from the moment he appears swinging in the balance, no! not for a second; that is your chance for making sales, and your success will be determined in a great measure by the tenacity and staying powers you then exhibit. In advocating this plan of not giving the buyer a pause to consider, I do not mean to suggest that a man is not entitled to ponder well what he is buying, neither do I assert that the salesman will be successful every time he employs these tactics, but I am thoroughly convinced that giving your man an unreasonable time to consider is fatal to making sales, and, by avoiding this, you will succeed in getting a higher percentage of successes. By the time the buyer is brought to the wavering stage he has doubtless discussed the question very fully, and the traveller should use every endeavour to brush away the flimsy barrier which then stands between him and success.



## CHAPTER XI.

### BUILDING UP AND INCREASING AN ORDER.

WHEN the salesman has at last succeeded in overcoming the buyer's scruples and starts booking, all his tact and ability must be exercised in building up his order. A great deal has been accomplished when he gets the buyer's name down with an item against it, but, in the hands of a skilful traveller, such an entry would be merely the foundation upon which to raise a large and varied parcel. Some men have brought this building-up process to a science and, by tactful suggestion and manipulation, they can increase the business in a marvellous degree. The buyer's method, if he buys at all, is to order the smallest possible parcel, so practically everything depends on the salesman, whether he succeeds in placing a gross instead of a dozen, or a ton in place of a cwt.

The first entry should be looked upon merely as a hook on which to hang his other items, always assuming, of course, that he is reasonable in his demands. As by far the greater portion of business is secured by suggestion, you will find it profitable to study the art fully, and have a fair list of likely lines treasured up mentally, wherewith to jog the buyer's memory. The traveller should always bear in mind that a buyer has so many lines to think of that he may actually be in

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

the position of not knowing at the moment what he does want in your way. As a proof of this, I have frequently sold goods by suggestion which the buyer assured me were the very articles he intended ordering, but which had escaped his memory for the moment. When you have exhausted all the likely items you have to offer, and, let us hope, have succeeded in placing not a few, "surely," says some reader, "I may now conscientiously close my order-book." No! not yet! it is possible to still further increase your order. In travelling mentally through my price-list during the process of suggesting likely lines to the buyer, I have sometimes noted an item already booked which appeared to me capable of expansion. Consequently at the right moment I have returned to that item and endeavoured to show the buyer how he could safely increase it. The result has often justified the experiment.

In booking a large assortment of goods, where I did not think it wise to interrupt the buyer, I found it a good plan to put a distinguishing mark against those lines which I fancied might be increased, afterwards discussing them in detail with the buyer. My conviction is that it is wise to let a man finish ordering his assortment before you start on the building-up process. By entering into a discussion with him on certain items as they are booked, you may easily drive out of his memory something else which he intended ordering. The safest way, therefore, is to let the buyer thoroughly exhaust his list first, you making mental notes meantime. By so doing you lose nothing,

## *Selling Unreasonable Quantities of Goods*

and the building-up process will fall in afterwards in a more agreeable and appropriate manner.

The whole art of suggesting and increasing orders is a highly interesting one, and when brought to a high state of perfection, will enable the traveller to materially increase his returns.

### SELLING UNREASONABLE QUANTITIES OF GOODS.

How often does the traveller hear of a buyer being blocked up with certain lines as the result of his having bought too heavily. Some nice tale of a likely rise in prices or an extra special discount for large parcels has influenced him against his better judgment, and he finds, to his vexation, that he has sunk capital in goods which are not likely to be converted into cash as early as he anticipated. The salesman who is responsible for this state of matters is not likely, at his subsequent visits, to get a favourable reception from the buyer. In this connection, therefore, considerable discretion should be exercised by the traveller in placing goods. I know there is a great temptation to sell all you possibly can, but you must have some little conscience in the matter, and not sell your client more stock than he can reasonably get rid of. This is particularly to be observed in selling season lines or perishable goods, as you will soon ruin your connection if you persist in saddling a man with bad stock. It may be urged that the buyer has only himself to blame for not correctly anticipating his requirements, but, as your representations were doubtless largely responsible for the sale, you will have

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considerable difficulty in convincing him that you have done the right thing.

A buyer may voluntarily order a parcel of goods which you know from experience is larger than he can judiciously do with. It would be well, in those circumstances, to draw his attention to it. He will appreciate your motive, and I make bold to assert that you will, as a consequence, do more business with him throughout the year than if you blocked him up with unreasonable quantities.

The same care must be taken in selling goods which you feel are unsuitable for his particular trade or district; lines which might find a ready sale in one part may be altogether out of place in another, and in order to strengthen your connection, you must discriminate in matters of this kind. There is little satisfaction to be gained by your House, your customer, or yourself, in selling unreasonable and unsuitable parcels of goods, and the traveller who wishes to make a success of his ground will do well to bear this in mind.

### SENDING A MAN MORE GOODS THAN HE ORDERS.

To the average mind it seems almost incredible that a commercial traveller should, in all good faith, book an order for certain stated quantities of goods and then coolly send his client a much larger parcel than he bought. And yet, as we salesmen know, it is done every day. In addition to being extremely foolish and calculated to sever a connection, such an action is unjustifiable and, to my mind, wholly

## *Sending more Goods than Ordered*

unpardonable. One might as well say that our grocer or our butcher is justified in quietly ignoring our specific requirements, and sending us only what suits himself. Some salesmen think that, because of their sound connection, they may safely take the liberty of increasing an order, soothing their conscience by the reflection that "It is only Mr —, we are such good friends that he won't mind," etc. etc. Moreover, if the buyer should be annoyed, it is so easy to plead an error in booking the order, or to throw the blame on the House, for inadvertently sending more than was ordered. In short, the salesman may hope to make a plausible defence, but one which, I fear, would be frequently unavailing. Even under the most favourable conditions, the most you can hope for is to convince the buyer that a palpable error has been made at your end, surely a painful admission to make, and one which may readily shake his faith in your business capacity. No connection is ever so sound as to permit of such liberties, and the traveller may find to his cost some day that he has imposed a trifle too much on his customer's good-nature. The sleeping lion may awake and give him to understand that his tail has been trod upon a little too heavily. It is commendable to try by every legitimate method to make your order as heavy as possible, but nothing can justify your increasing the quantity without first obtaining the buyer's permission. I am aware that circumstances occasionally arise which make it desirable, even from the buyer's standpoint, to

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

increase an order, *e.g.*, a customer mails an order for a parcel of goods which, although actually entitled to a certain discount, may, by a slight increase, reach a quantity that would command a higher discount. The probabilities are that he would have ordered the larger parcel had he been aware of all the circumstances. In a case of that kind you would, as a business man, communicate with your customer, showing how he may profitably increase his order. In this way you may hope to get the increased business and, at the same time, gain the goodwill of your client.

The little you gain by sending a larger parcel of your own accord than is ordered, is more than counterbalanced by the great risk you run of permanently closing the account.

### BEING THANKFUL FOR INTERVIEW.

One of the best impressions a salesman can leave with a buyer is to appear thankful for the interview. Considering the many claims made on the time of a busy man to whom every moment has its value, it is nothing more than right that some little appreciation of the favour should be shown.

It is not necessary nor, on many occasions, is it desirable, to give actual expression to your thanks, but you should, nevertheless, strive to appear gratified. Particularly on your first visit, when every little point has its effect, it will be found advantageous to convey the impression that you are thankful for the time accorded you.

## CHAPTER XII.

### BREAKING NEW GROUND.

THIS may truly be said to be the *crux* of the profession, and is generally considered to be, without doubt, the greatest task the commercial traveller can undertake. In other words, the man who can successfully break new ground must, of necessity, have selling powers of a high order, and should be fit for anything or anybody. When one realises the difficulty of keeping a connection already formed, where the salesman is well known to his customers and his House thoroughly established, it will be apparent that the man who has neither of those advantages, must have stupendous difficulties to overcome. I have done a great deal of pioneer work in my time, and can thoroughly sympathise with the "commercial" who has this arduous duty to perform. It takes years of hard work to form a sound connection, but some one must be the first to introduce the goods. For the benefit of the pioneer, then, I purpose dealing with the matter at considerable length, and if I should sometimes appear prolix, I trust it will be understood that it arises from a desire to leave nothing unsaid that might be of even the slightest advantage. Let us assume, therefore, that your

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House is a comparatively new one, or has merely a local influence and is desirous of extending its business to another district, and let it be supposed that you are the salesman selected for the purpose of introduction. The headquarters of your firm are, say, in London, and their business hitherto has been solely confined to that city, but, having met with success locally, they send you to open up the provincial markets. You have now a clean sheet before you, your House is unknown outside of London, and you are likewise an entire stranger to the provinces, for I am taking the extreme case of your never hitherto having visited those districts you purpose working.

Under those conditions it will readily occur to you that the best way to work the territory will be to make the large towns your centres and, from them, to work the surroundings. The benefits of so doing are manifold, among which may be mentioned, the ground is more consolidated, working expenses are reduced to a minimum, train and tram service are more perfect, and there exists a greater variety of living accommodation with more conveniences. The traveller having selected his centre and being now *en route*, we shall accompany him and suggest his mode of procedure. Some travellers believe in procuring the local directory and compiling therefrom a list of the particular tradesmen they wish to see, and certainly where a salesman has few calls to make, this plan works out very well.

On the other hand, if he has numerous calls,



*Breaking New Ground*

I would suggest the alternative method hereafter described, and, in fact, I would recommend it as the best in every case. One of the first things I have done on arriving in a large town for the first time has been to get a reliable local time-table. I have next procured a handy plan of the streets, of which it would be advisable to get two copies, for reasons which will be apparent hereafter. Having fixed on his headquarters which, it is needless to say, should be as central as possible and convenient to train and tram, the traveller may now settle down to the last few preliminaries necessary before starting to place his goods. Spreading his street plan before him he may at once black out all Public Parks, Harbours, Rivers and Docks shown on the plan, in short, everything should be obliterated except the actual districts where his class of tradesmen have their business premises. He may then select any part on the fringe of the map and note in his small diary a few streets in that district. "Why the fringe of the map?" I think I hear some one say. Because I have found from actual experience that it is preferable to work from the outskirts of a large town, gradually closing in on the centre from all sides. The reason for this is, that the central portion of the city, being, as a rule, the busiest part, the complete stranger is more apt to get confused, and by working the outskirts first, he is getting more familiar with the busy portion by the time he is due to work it. At an early stage the salesman should make out a list of all towns in the

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

territory, showing their populations, market days and early closings.

He will thus see when to avoid certain towns because of early closing, etc., and, on studying the matter closely, he will find the population of a district a good indication of the time required for working it. In fact, all through my travelling experience, I have pinned great faith to the study of populations, and have been enabled therefrom to calculate my movements and arrange my time to a nicety. On travelling extensively over the British Isles, I found tradesmen in every town and village to be generally in the same ratio to population, and have thus been able to tell exactly how long it would take to work any particular town, district, or even country.

And now the first real pioneer work begins; the salesman proceeds direct to that part of the town he has selected, taking with him his small diary and one of the street plans as a guide to his whereabouts. He starts working the streets previously noted, scoring each out of his diary as completed.

And let me here suggest that the best way to work a street is to go up one side first, cross over and work down the other. A greater saving of time is effected in this way than by crossing and recrossing from one side to the other. One has only to trace out on paper the route traversed both ways to see how much has been gained. The salesman will soon find numerous side streets running off the one he is working, and may naturally be perplexed as to how he should deal with them. Plainly then, he must avoid

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them meantime as he would a plague, as I have no hesitation in stating firmly and positively that, if he pays the slightest attention to these side streets at this stage, he will soon get hopelessly mixed and lose both time and business. He must stick rigidly to the thoroughfare he is working until it is completely and absolutely finished. Where two main streets run parallel and within easy reach of one another, it will be found advisable to work both of them first and then systematically take all streets connecting them. And now we come to the question of taking notes, in which I may say I am and always have been a firm believer. The benefits derived from noting all prospects and little items that may prove useful more than compensate for the trifling labour of booking them.

If the buyer is absent, or for some other reason cannot be seen when you call, you will of course note his name and address, and also ascertain when he can be seen. As you are almost certain to carry some form of advertising matter, you should leave something for the buyer's perusal. I believe greatly in leaving some literature for the man you have not seen, as I have frequently found, on calling next day, that he had seen my leaflet and had some idea of the nature of the business. The great importance of systematically and conscientiously following up those back calls cannot be too strongly impressed upon the salesman, and I can assure the reader that I was often greatly surprised, and of course gratified, at the high proportion of successes that resulted from nursing

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those prospects. Needless to say, anything that shows even the smallest percentage of a prospect should be followed up promptly and resolutely; otherwise the effect has died away, and the work has all to be gone over again.

As occasionally happens, a buyer cannot be seen for some days or perhaps weeks, owing to sickness, holidays, etc. A separate list of those cases should be kept, and just before leaving the territory, a day or two may profitably be spent in looking them up.

The guiding principle in breaking new ground is to see every man who could buy your goods, and, in justice to your House and to yourself, this should be done. The man you miss may probably be the one who would have bought, and this you cannot know unless you call upon him.

On returning to his headquarters at night, the pioneer will proceed to make use of his second street plan—you remember he bought two.

He should black out of the plan every street he has traversed or worked during the day, and, if this system be carried out each night, he will always be able to see at a glance exactly how much of the city he has worked and how much remains to be done.

He should also note for the following day any prospects or back calls raised from his working, and before starting on the fresh ground he should follow up and endeavour to complete those prospects.

The advisability of remaining in a district until it is completely finished will be thus apparent.

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Hopping about from one part of a town to another and endeavouring to work streets indiscriminately would result in confusion and would only court failure. When one end of a large town has been worked the adjoining portion should next be tackled, and so on until you have completed the circle of the city, *e.g.*, you start say in the southern district, on finishing which you take either the east or the west fringe and then the north. The central portion may then be worked, and the entire completion of the territory effected. Some doubt may arise as to whether the salesman should work a large centre completely until it is finished and then take up the surrounding towns, or whether he should work the city and its environs simultaneously. The question is to a great extent one of personal opinion or of taste, but I have carefully tested both ways and unhesitatingly decide in favour of the simultaneous process.

A portion of the country districts could be worked concurrently with the town each week, and the completion of the entire territory—both town and country—could be made coincident. Canvassing a large town constantly for a considerable time is apt to become depressing, particularly if you are not meeting with much success, and, by running out to the country occasionally, where an altogether different and more congenial environment prevails, the traveller will feel a decided benefit in health and spirits. In this connection, my invariable practice was to spend the first three days of the week in the town, and the remaining portion in the country. The reason for

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so doing will be obvious when it is considered that the latter part of the week is the tradesman's harvest, and, particularly in the city, he will be too busy to give you attention. Generally speaking, this is not so apparent in the country towns. In addition to blacking out of the plan from day to day those streets worked in the city, the salesman should score off his list the country towns as completed, and thus obtain a correct understanding of his progress. And now, I cannot call to mind anything further that would materially assist the pioneer.

The many additional and varied points that are certain to arise in breaking new ground will be found treated elsewhere in this work, under their respective headings. Each day's procedure will be to a great extent a repetition of its predecessor, and the method here suggested of working one territory will be found applicable to all. I have sought to offer a solution for the most difficult problems that arise in pioneering work, realising that the greater questions settled, the lesser ones would be simple. In breaking new ground, two main features should be ever present to the salesman, viz. to get an audience with every man who handles his class of goods, and to economise his time to the full. Otherwise, he cannot leave the territory conscientiously feeling that he has taken everything possible off the ground.

In the foregoing I have endeavoured to outline the most effectual means of accomplishing this end, and trust it may assist the salesman to secure many good lines.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### CONDUCT WITH REGARD TO WHOLESALE BUYERS.

THE wholesale agent or distributor plays a highly important part in business, and his trade is generally well worth catering for. True, you cannot hope to get the same high prices from him as from the retailer, but, on the other hand, he handles much larger quantities, besides giving you the benefit of his connection. In introducing a new line, the salesman will often come across a retailer who would be willing enough to order a small trial parcel, provided that the goods were passed through his own local wholesale agent. There would be little difficulty in arranging this but for the all-important fact of the wholesaler being proverbially slow to take up new lines. You must endeavour, however, to pass your goods through the wholesale Houses, particularly as the trial orders, in many cases, would be too small to send direct from Headquarters. The wholesaler cannot profitably be done without, and it will be apparent that his co-operation is very desirable. But, without his aid, it is possible, in several ways, to cope with those orders which come under the carriage-paid limits, viz. :—

- (1) Enclosing the smaller parcel to some buyer who has ordered a full quantity; in this

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case the permission of both parties is necessary.

- (2) Forwarding a number of small orders in one consignment to a local carrier with instructions to distribute each to its respective destination. There are two methods of doing this: (a) packing all the parcels fully addressed in one large case or package, consigning same to the carrier; (b) when goods are packed in cases with consignee's address card nailed on, another card addressed to the carrier should be nailed over that one, so that, on arrival of the consignment, the carrier could tear off the upper card and deliver per the one beneath.
- (3) A considerable quantity of goods could be sent from Headquarters to be stored on the spot, in which case it would be a simple matter to execute small orders, or large ones if necessary, ex that stock.

If none of the above methods be suitable or convenient, there still remains the medium of the wholesaler, and, generally speaking, this will be found to be the most practical way of dealing with the matter. As previously mentioned, however, the co-operation of the wholesaler cannot always be had for the asking, and you will sometimes find it impossible at first to place your goods with him. Incredible as it may seem, you will meet wholesalers who will not stock your goods even when you undertake to sell them for them. Under those conditions they could not



## *Conduct with Wholesale Buyers*

possibly be left with bad stock, and, moreover, they would earn the commission on your working, but occasionally every scheme will be alike powerless to convert the wholesale buyer.

Where you have to deal with one of that sort, who is deaf to all proposals and suggestions, you must perforce leave him for the present, and should begin systematically calling on the retailers. When you have secured from them a number of orders for execution through certain specific wholesale agents, you should then approach those agents and induce them to order a sufficient quantity of your goods to cover the actual orders on hand, they to distribute the parcels and collect the accounts. When the wholesaler sees that you have already placed your wares with his own customers, he will invariably be willing enough to order a parcel to cover same. Of course, it is understood that these methods of inducing the wholesaler to buy are only to be employed when it is utterly impossible to place your goods with him in the ordinary way. And now a final word in passing may be said with regard to the salesman's attitude in selling to both wholesaler and retailer.

Considerable discretion has to be shown in selling direct to a retail buyer who is also a customer of your own wholesale agent. Every £1 worth of goods you sell to a retailer represents a loss to the wholesaler of a commission equal to the difference between the wholesale and retail list, and naturally he will resent your selling direct to his customer. The tendency of some manufacturers, however, is to

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sell, and of some retailers to buy as much direct as possible. The wholesaler's trade has therefore to a great extent resolved itself into the handling of parcels that are too small to be sent direct, and, on that account, his business is well worth looking after.

### CONDUCT IN DEALING WITH PARTNERS.

However difficult it may be to sell goods to one party, it is invariably easier than when you have to deal with two or more partners who have all to be consulted before an order is given. In speaking of partners, a broad view has to be taken in this connection, as, when a principal consults his assistant, or a husband his wife, as to the advisability of buying your goods, the difficulty of placing them is the same. The forces are unequal in strength, and while you are combating the arguments of one partner, the other is having time to form fresh ones. Besides, as frequently happens, the buyers may view the matter from different standpoints, so that, when you succeed in convincing one, you have often great trouble in getting the other veered round to his partner's view. In short, the whole matter is fraught with difficulties, and I have always considered it one of the worst possible conditions under which to sell goods. As a rule, neither party will order without the sanction of the other, and consequently all your tact and ability must be employed in reconciling the two views. Unfortunately, there is no royal road to this, as the circumstances admit of

## *Keeping a Connection*

so much variation, but, wherever possible, I recommend the following plan, which I frequently found to work out satisfactorily. Endeavour by all means to isolate the partners, and approach them at different times. In this way you can get their individual approval, so that when they confer the chances will be decidedly in your favour.

### KEEPING A CONNECTION.

When the traveller has established a sound connection, one would naturally suppose that he could then rest on his oars and take matters easy. Unfortunately, this is not so, and, although the difficult pioneer work is over, the keeping of a connection already formed requires delicate handling and careful nursing. Rival Houses are continually endeavouring to oust you, and the persistent calling of their representatives is certain to have its effect. Moreover, new firms, anxious to get your customer on their books, are offering special inducements in prices, bonuses, window-shows, sampling, long credit, in short anything and everything to get the business.

It is suicidal policy, therefore, for the salesman to relax his efforts, and it behoves him to thoroughly study the requirements of his customer, keeping him posted up in everything useful, and giving him any advantages there may be in fluctuations of prices, special offers, etc. In short, you must take a decided interest in his business, and contrive to cater for him to the best advantage. The feeling of re-

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

ciprocating should be exhibited, as it is only natural that a man will more readily support those who show some little concern for his welfare. Let the buyer see, then, that you have some interest in him beyond the actual procurement of business. Perhaps the greatest mistake that many travellers, who have a good connection, make, is in presuming too much on their long acquaintance with a customer; no connection is ever so sound as to permit of taking undue liberties, or of demanding orders instead of soliciting them. Many a good account has been permanently closed by a salesman foolishly overstepping the boundary which separates the buyer from the seller, the solicitor from the client, the patron from the dependent. Unduly pressing an old customer for business should also be guarded against, particularly if you are seeing him at short intervals. Once you verge on the lines of becoming tiresome, your connection must suffer. Other elements that combine to ruin a connection are leaving your customer with unsaleable stock, sending him more than he orders, and selling him unreasonable quantities. So important indeed have I considered these questions that I have treated them more fully elsewhere in this book.

In keeping a connection, the salesman should never forget that the sources of supply are so numerous that the buyer is not compelled to patronise any one House, and that his patronage will only be *pro rata* to your influence with him and the manner in which you cater for his requirements.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MISTAKES AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

“To err is human,” and the man who cannot make a mistake is a *rara avis* indeed. There are few professions, if any, that are absolutely free from their little errors and misconceptions, and certainly commercial travelling is not one of them. There may be some license allowed with regard to pure misunderstandings, but, even at the risk of being considered uncharitable, I cannot well find an excuse for habitual blunders and mistakes. Perhaps the most prolific source of errors in commercial travelling may be traced to the booking of the order, and generally most of the troubles that subsequently arise could have been arrested at this stage. Consequently, if the salesman makes a point of correctly noting what his client orders, and as carefully transmitting the same to Headquarters, the risk of mistakes will be reduced to a minimum. Even the most perfect accuracy in this respect, however, is not sufficient to rob the sale of all chances of misunderstanding. In order to place the matter on a fairly sound basis, I have always, on booking an order, made a practice of carefully reading it over to the buyer, emphasising the quantities, prices, discounts and terms. In any subsequent dispute, therefore, the buyer's defence would be substantially weakened by your having, at the time of sale, rehearsed and got his tacit approval to every item.

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

Where a palpable error occurs, it can invariably be traced to its source, and the blame laid on the right shoulders ; but, with misunderstandings, though less blamable than blunders, the case is even more unfortunate, in so far as it is frequently difficult, if not impossible, to discover exactly how the dispute has arisen. The buyer asserts positively that he ordered a certain quantity of goods, whereas you are just as certain that you sold him a different quantity. So also with regard to prices, questions of carriage, and even to the description of the goods. From whatever cause the dispute arises, the difficulty of settlement is the same, particularly if you did not take the precaution to read over the order to the buyer at the time of booking. But, in spite of everything, the matter will sometimes become a deadlock, and a climax is reached where the buyer cannot or will not see your view, and may threaten to close his account if you do not settle as he wishes. At this acute stage, a compromise will often bring about the desired result ; and I have seldom found it ineffectual to appeal to a man's own sense of justice and fairplay, to settle on the lines of give and take.

If all attempts at settlement fail, of course it will then rest with the House to concede the point or lose the customer. The surest way to avoid errors of this description is a simple one, but, unfortunately, it is a method that few buyers will take the trouble to adopt, viz., giving a written order for their goods. Nor is it advisable to suggest this course, as many buyers would consider it a reflection on their rectitude and indignantly refuse. They might readily say,

## *Religion and Politics*

“Why should I give you a written order? Is not my word good enough?” On the many other and varied mistakes that may readily occur, either with the salesman or at Headquarters, it is needless to dwell, as they are generally of such a nature as can be easily traced and consequently remedied. Suffice it to say that, in whatever form of error or dispute that may arise, one guiding principle should be adopted, viz., to follow up and settle promptly, as the longer they hang fire the greater the difficulty of arriving at a satisfactory result.

### CUSTOMERS' HOBBIES.

I have rarely met the man who had no hobby or fad; we have all some *penchant* in which we are more than usually interested, and over which we are prone to become enthusiastic. And however much we may pooh-pooh the suggestion, it is none the less true that we have a particular liking for those who humour us in our pet ideas. Such being the case, the salesman should early seek to discover his customer's hobby, after which it will be an easy matter to fraternise with him. Whatever is of interest to your client—however trivial or ridiculous it may appear to others—should be carefully studied and made the most of. I know it is sometimes difficult to ascertain a customer's hobby, but the judicious introduction of a conversation on hobbies in general will frequently draw your client out.

### RELIGION AND POLITICS.

There are few subjects, if any, on which men hold such strong views as on Religion and Politics, and a

## *How to become a Commercial Traveller*

great deal of unnecessary friction is often caused by the unwise introduction of these topics. I hold that they should never be introduced into business, and the traveller should bar them entirely from his conversation. He has to earn his living from all parties and creeds alike, and consequently should avoid giving prominence to his religious and political views. I have travelled and sold goods to men in nearly every part of the United Kingdom, and have never once been asked what views I held on the two greatest of all subjects, and it goes without saying that I never displayed an undue anxiety to learn the views of my customers. The path of the commercial traveller—never a particularly smooth one—will become infinitely more rugged when he foolishly introduces the subjects here mentioned.

### ADVISING CUSTOMERS.

In most trades it is customary, and indeed desirable, that your customer should be advised of your intended visit. The advantages of so doing are twofold: it enables the buyer to have a look round in order to see what he can buy from you, and, if you have an account to collect, he gets time to make his arrangements for meeting it. In some cases the advising is done direct from Headquarters, and, in others, by the representative. At any rate, in order to be efficacious, it must be done regularly and systematically. Where the scope in advising is limited, and it is utterly impossible to advise all your customers, you should, in any case, notify those for whom you have statements. A reminder to those also from whom you have good



## *Presenting Statements*

reason to expect orders will frequently pay for the trouble of writing it.

### PRESENTING STATEMENTS.

In the collecting of accounts some little tact has to be shown in the manner of presenting statements for payment. As to whether you should present your statement the moment you enter a business place, this is largely a matter of opinion. Personally, I have never done so, and I have got payment just the same. Few men care to be reminded of their debts, and the salesman who ostentatiously produces his statement, thereby giving undue prominence to the matter, lacks discretionary powers. It is much more desirable to let your customer ask for his account, but, unfortunately, a gentle, and sometimes forcible, reminder is necessary to ensure payment. Some men are ridiculously sensitive on the point of being asked to pay their just debts—although I have never been able to see why they should be so. So extreme in this respect are some buyers that the mere presenting of a statement is sufficient to throw them into a towering passion. In this connection a safe line to take is to make no mention of the account at first, but, at a favourable moment, refer to it casually, and more in the nature of an afterthought. It is well to convey the impression to your client that you had well-nigh forgotten his account, and that you mention it more as a matter of custom than of necessity.

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### KEEPING OF DIARIES AND RECORDS.

It is a matter of taste whether the traveller should keep records and particulars of his returns, and much will depend on his methodical habits. True, the keeping of records has nothing whatever to do with one's selling powers, and I have known brilliant salesmen who kept no details of their work. At the same time, I am very much in favour of noting all particulars of one's business, especially if you are paid by results. I have always kept a business diary, in which I enter every day the town or district worked, with amount of business done and expenses incurred. The totals are carried forward, and, if kept regularly posted up, it is thus easy to see at a glance how your returns compare with the corresponding period of any given week, month or year. In addition, I have made a practice of entering each night in my pocket-diary the town or district I purposed working the following day, together with details of trains and their connections necessary for the working thereof. All special calls, appointments, and prospects raised should also be noted. In the keeping of diaries and records, I have been chiefly animated by the following desires : (a) To economise my time to the full by drawing up a detailed programme for each day, and endeavouring to carry it straight through ; (b) to relieve my memory by noting everything that was likely to be recalled ; (c) to compare present work with past, so that I could rejoice at my progress, or be spurred on to still greater exertions.

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